

Scat-Sniffing Dogs Help with Mountain Lion Survey in Anza-Borrego



CA Fish and Wildlife working with dogs and their handlers of "[Rogue Detection Teams](#)" to study mountain lions in Anza-Borrego



Trained rescue pup Filson posing next to our State Park sign for his human handler Jennifer Hartman (December 2020)



Filson being rewarded for sniffing out mountain lion scat in Anza-Borrego with his favorite ball (sharpie for size)

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) biologist Justin Dellinger helps coordinate a comprehensive mountain lion survey in California. Based on a 1996 population estimate, there are 4,000-6,000 mountain lions in the State but numbers have never been formally assessed and population distribution in specific geographic areas remained completely unknown. As part of this study, a combination of methods and approaches are being utilized to define status of mountain lions in our local Park and surrounding areas. Data are collected via:

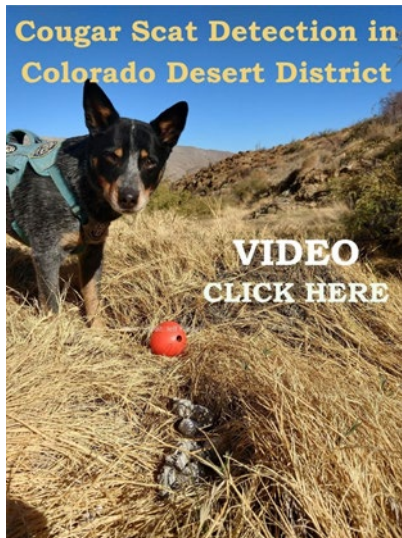
- Collaring individual animals with radio collars
- Collecting scat in habitat and recording location
- Genetic and other scat analyses by geneticists and biologists at the CDFW laboratory
- Statistical evaluation of genetic and collaring data

Jennifer Hartman is a field scientist and the Communications Director for Rogue Detection Teams, a small non-profit organization hired by wildlife and conservation agencies not just across California but the entire United States and the globe to assist with wildlife studies and even rare plant surveys. Jennifer is the human handler and bouncer for rescue pup Filson, trained to sniff out mountain lion scat in the field. Partnering with CDFW on the mountain lion study, Jennifer and Heath Smith, together with their canine partners Filson and Pips, spent much time recently at Anza-Borrego, Cuyamaca and Palomar Mountain State Parks to sniff out mountain lion scat, and collect samples for further analyses. Jennifer explains, "Scat provides information on diet, habitat use and genetic data such as gender. It can help to identify specific individuals and even provide information on possible diseases".



Satellite-collared female mountain lion photographed via remote camera at a deer kill site near ABDSP (Photo courtesy of CDFW South Coast Region)

CDFW Mountain Lion and Gray Wolf Researcher Justin Dellinger, leader of the multi-year effort, shared, "Dogs are a critical aspect of this comprehensive mountain lion study. Without them, we would lose the ability to pursue less invasive approaches to study population size and status. We are very excited to be partnering with the Rogue Detection Teams".



[Click here](#) to view a short video clip of Filson and Jennifer during their recent mountain lion survey work in Anza-Borrego Desert, Palomar Mountain and Cuyamaca Rancho State Parks! Look out for a longer feature on Justin's work in one of our future e-connections! Go Team!

Friendly reminder: *The professionally trained dogs and their human handlers highlighted here have a special, temporary, state research permit and follow protocols to minimize potential wildlife impact. Dogs are not allowed in the Park or on hiking trails. They are allowed on a 6-ft leash in campgrounds, day-use picnic areas and on Park-designated dirt roads where cars are legal. To learn more details and where dogs are permitted in Anza-Borrego, [click here](#).*